



Climate-related disaster opens a window of opportunity for rural poor in northeastern Honduras

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Abstract:

Two distinct views are evident in research on how rural communities in developing countries cope with extreme weather events brought by climate change: (i) that the resource-reliant poor are acutely vulnerable and need external assistance to prepare for such events, and (ii) that climate-related shocks can offer windows of opportunity in which latent local adaptive capacities are triggered, leading to systemic improvement. Results from a longitudinal study in a Tawahka community in Honduras before and after Hurricane Mitch (1994-2002) indicate that residents were highly vulnerable to the hurricane--due in part to previous development assistance--and that the poorest households were the hardest hit. Surprisingly, however, the disaster enabled the poor to initiate an institutional change that led to more equitable land distribution, slowed primary forest conversion, and positioned the community well to cope with comparable flooding occurring 10 y later. The study provides compelling evidence that communities can seize on the window of opportunity created by climate-induced shocks to generate sustained social-ecological improvement, and suggests that future interventions should foster local capacities for endogenous institutional change to enhance community resilience to climate shocks.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3069189>

Resource Description

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

Extreme Weather Event: Flooding, Hurricanes/Cyclones, Landslides

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Rural

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Non-United States: Non-U.S. North America

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: 

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Low Socioeconomic Status, Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroup: Tawahka (Indigenous Hondurans)

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience: 

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content